

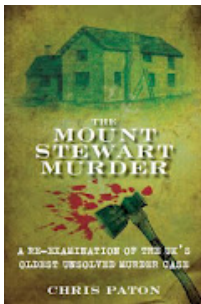
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The top stories and events concerning British Isles ancestral research from Irish born Scottish based blogger historian Chris Paton. Feel free to quote from this blog, but please credit British GENES if you do so, and with a link. Should you wish to get in touch, please do so at christopherpaton @ tiscali.co.uk. Happy hunting!

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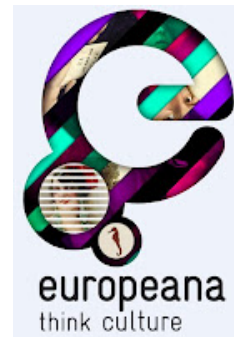


WEDNESDAY, 2 MAY 2012

Europeana WW1 roadshow results

From the Hague, a press release about the new Europeana WW1 roadshow digitisation project which recently visited Preston and Dublin:

Untold and extraordinary real-life stories from World War 1 have come to light and will be shared online as a result of family history roadshows run by the digital innovation service Europeana (www.europeana.com). They include a life-saving Bible, the first-hand testimony of a centenarian, and a postcard from a 27-year-old soldier named Adolf Hitler, which suggests that the future dictator had problems with his teeth and his spelling.



In preparation for the 100th anniversary of the conflict, WW1 roadshows have been held in Germany, England, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Denmark. People are invited to bring along WW1 memorabilia to be seen by experts and digitised. The Europeana 1914-1918 website also shows people how to upload their own digital scans. The idea for the roadshows came from the success of the University of Oxford's Great War Archive in 2008, funded by leading UK educational technology innovator, JISC.

Two thousand people of all ages from across Europe have attended the roadshows to share family stories. Roadshow participants have been joined by online contributors and 45,000 photos of objects, scanned letters and diaries have been uploaded onto the website to date. Most of these are previously unpublished and have never been seen or studied outside the families.

Jill Cousins, Executive Director of Europeana said: "The project's success highlights the huge interest that Europeans have in their shared history. People pass their stories down their families, and in Europeana have found the means to preserve them for future generations, and make them universally accessible. Europeana brings a new approach to cultural history, linking people's own stories to the official histories of the war that we're collecting from the national libraries and archives."

Markus Geiler contributed pictures of his grandfather's life-saving Bible, with the lump of shrapnel embedded in it from the grenade that killed his comrades while they slept. He said: "I am here to show how a family story can actually become part of the collective memory of Europe. I hope that there will be many, many such stories, and the European idea will develop

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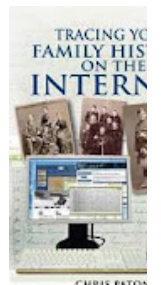
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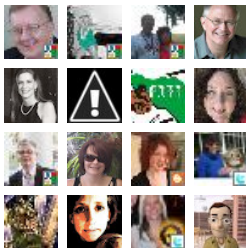
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even further when people deal together with the past and tell each other their stories.”

In Preston, UK, John Stafford's first hand account of the Battle of the Somme was brought along by his daughter Joan Almond, 85. The typed manuscript documents Stafford's experiences and illustrates how he coped with post traumatic stress disorder, decades before the condition was recognised. Stafford lay horribly injured for two days until Allied troops found him and carried him across 'Death Valley' to medical help. Joan said: "I think the war must have haunted him a lot, especially when you read his account. My mother used to encourage him to write down his experiences and this seemed to have a calming influence.”

The participation of Irishmen in WW1 was politically sensitive and as a result many of their stories have never been told. That was one reason why the Dublin roadshow was the best attended in Europe so far. More than 600 people turned up, some queuing for hours, to share their memorabilia and stories. They include a marvellous wartime love story, told by Joseph Heapes' daughter-in-law, Máire, of how Joseph found the love of his life, Mary, while a prisoner of war in Germany.

Slovenian centenarian Slavko Zupan is one participant able to share his direct memories of the war. His enthusiasm for the project was such that he visited the roadshow in Nova Gorica, Slovenia, twice. To illustrate his childhood recollections Slavko brought along a bottle containing a richly decorated wooden crucifix. It was made by a Russian prisoner of war in Slovenia. Existing on meagre rations, prisoners crafted such objects to barter for food or cigarettes. The crucifix has been in Slavko's family since 1916.

The Munich roadshow revealed what at first sight appears to be just one of many postcards sent by soldiers in the field. The postcard, 'Greetings from Nuremberg', describes the sender's recent trip to the dentist and his desire to go back to the front line. That soldier was Adolf Hitler, writing to his comrade Karl Lanzhammer in December 1916.

Director of Oxford University Computing Services, Dr Stuart Lee, one of the digital experts attending the roadshow, recalls the moment when he was first handed Hitler's postcard: "I felt a shudder run through me. I found it hard to believe that at a local event to record ordinary people's stories, I was seeing a previously unknown document in Hitler's own hand. Europeana's project is remarkable in that it can bring in the most meaningful story in a person's whole existence - the Bible that saved a life, for example - as well as the mundane and misspelt jottings of the future dictator.”

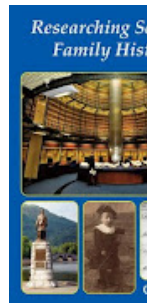
Oxford University has provided professional expertise to Europeana 1914-18, leading the training for the family roadshows, and providing expert support in digitising and cataloguing.

(With thanks to Europeana)

Chris

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Scotland's Greatest Story research service www.ScotlandsGreatestStory.co.uk and www.facebook.com/ScottishGenealogyResearch



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